

MORMONS AND LINEAGE: THE COMPLICATED HISTORY OF BLACKS AND PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS, 1830–2018

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Declaring the lineage of Black Latter-day Saints is a challenging problem for patriarchs in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons, like many Protestant Christians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, asserted that Black people were a cursed race. Mormons and Protestants believed that God placed a curse of dark sin on Black people as descendants of Cain, the biblical counterfigure who murdered his brother Abel, to distinguish them from God's covenant people. The curse, carried on through the lineage of Noah's son Ham, relegated Blacks to a lifetime of servitude and bondage to white people. The divine curse provided a rationale for early Americans to enslave millions of Africans and to impose harsh penalties on Blacks and whites who transgressed strict laws forbidding interracial intimacy, love, and sex.¹ For Mormons,

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1. Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University

the divine curse prohibited persons of African ancestry from holding the priesthood and participating in sacred temple rituals—a prohibition that lasted from 1852–1978.²

Somewhat quixotically, Mormons claimed to be the literal descendants of the House of Israel, in particular the lineage of Ephraim—the favored son of Joseph, the great grandson of the powerful Hebrew patriarch Abraham. As the self-appointed heirs of Ephraim, Mormon leaders theorized that Ephraim’s descendants would play a significant role in the restoration of ancient priesthood rituals foretold in Mormon scripture. Mormon scripture also affirms that Ephraim’s descendants would preach the gospel to the other tribes of Israel and lead the Church in the latter days.³

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mormon leaders articulated more fully what it meant to be God’s covenant people.⁴ They tied their “chosen status” as Ephraim’s descendants through “assignment to a particular lineage that preceded birth itself.”⁵ Lineage would be assigned by a patriarch, either from the Office of the Patriarch or

Press, 2003); and David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

2. Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Draper, Utah: Kofford, 2014); and Lester E. Bush Jr., “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11–68.

3. Abraham 2:9; Doctrine and Covenants 133:30–34, see also 64:36. For an expression of these duties, see Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 26.

4. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 18–26.

5. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55; and Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, chap. 2.

from a local patriarch in one of the stakes of the Church. Patterned after Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons in the Bible, Mormons accept these patriarchal blessings "as sacred words of instruction and promise."⁶ In these special blessings Mormons would learn their designated Israelite lineage, through which they would receive eternal blessings and salvation. As Michael Marquardt has shown in his compilation of patriarchal blessings, most Mormons claim lineage through the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, but other lineages are named too.⁷ According to the Church Historian's Office, which made a report to the Quorum of the Twelve in 1970, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel are represented in lineage pronouncements and as many as "fifteen other lineages had been named in blessings, including that of Cain."⁸

The Church Historian's report is not available, nor are the blessings themselves, which accounts for the dearth of scholarship on Blacks and patriarchal blessings.⁹ Nevertheless, enough blessings are available through

6. John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 48. For Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons, see Genesis 49:1–27. For the notion that patriarchal blessings were part of a series of rituals inspired by the Book of Mormon and Bible, see Jonathan A. Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6.

7. H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *Early Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2007); H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *Later Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2012). Marquardt provides an updated list of blessings on his website: <https://user.xmission.com/~research/mormonpdf/additionalpb5c.pdf>.

8. As cited in Irene M. Bates, "Patriarchal Blessings and the Routinization of Charisma," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 4.

9. Of the rich body of scholarship on Mormons and race, surprisingly little has been written about Blacks and patriarchal blessings. One exception is Bates, "Patriarchal Blessings," 3–8. Two seminal studies on Mormons and patriarchal blessings both skirt questions of race and lineage. See Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of Presiding Patriarch*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018); and Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd, *Binding Earth and Heaven: Patriarchal Blessings in the Prophetic Development of*

archives to make informed judgments about Blacks and lineage. Enriched by meeting minutes from the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, as well as firsthand accounts of patriarchs who gave the blessings, these valuable documents allow us to construct a rich narrative examining the complicated problem of declaring lineage to Black Latter-day Saints.

In this essay, I argue that Mormon leaders created an inchoate, confusing, and unevenly applied policy. Some patriarchs pronounced “the seed of Cain” on Black members during their blessings; others the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; while still others no lineage at all. Not until the late twentieth century did Mormon leaders begin to address the inconsistent and haphazard manner in which patriarchs declared lineage on Black Latter-day Saints. Eldred G. Smith, the great-great grandnephew of LDS Church founder Joseph Smith and the eighth patriarch of the LDS Church, claimed that Blacks should not receive a lineage designation because God had cursed them, which placed them outside of the House of Israel. His teachings clashed with those of other General Authorities, who averred that persons of African descent should receive a lineage designation. The priesthood revelation of 1978 allowing Black men to receive temple and priesthood privileges only complicated matters.

This new policy change posed all sorts of theological questions for Mormon leaders, prompting them to declare that Blacks could now be “adopted into the House of Israel.” Yet, even as the priesthood revelation challenged previously accepted concepts of Mormon lineage theology, it failed to resolve the nagging question of whether or not Blacks had been—or still were—a cursed race. Indeed, after the priesthood revelation LDS leaders maintained a troubling silence regarding the lineage of Black Latter-day Saints. In 2018, some forty years after the priesthood and temple ban ended, Black lineage remains a vexing problem in the LDS Church.

Early Mormonism (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012). Mauss’s *All Abraham’s Children* also ignores patriarchal blessings in his discussion of Black and Native American lineage within Mormonism.



The earliest known Black man to receive a patriarchal blessing was Elijah Abel, a faithful Latter-day Saint who joined the Church in 1832. Abel was one of a handful of Blacks who received the priesthood prior to Joseph Smith's death in 1844. Early Church records indicate that Abel, Joseph T. Ball, and Walker Q. Lewis all held the priesthood, and possibly two other men of African descent, William McCary and Black Pete.¹⁰ Available records indicate that during the Church presidencies of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young just five African Americans received their patriarchal blessings: Elijah Abel, Joseph Ball, Walker Lewis, Anthony Stebbins, a Black slave, and Jane Manning James.

Abel was ordained to the office of an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood in 1836 and ordained to the Third Quorum of the Seventy some nine months later.¹¹ Also that year he received his patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith Sr., whose appointment to the Office of the Patriarch

10. Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 109–10, 112, 128, 131; Bringham, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 37–38; and Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 6–7, 210–12, 230–31, 248–49. For William McCary's experience in the Mormon Church see Angela Pulley Hudson, *Real Native Genius: How an Ex-Slave and a White Mormon Became Famous Indians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 65–68; and Angela Pulley Hudson, "William McCary, Lucy Stanton, and the Performance of Race at Winter Quarters and Beyond," *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (2015): 97–130.

11. Kirtland elders' certificates, 1836–1838, Mar. 31, 1836, CR 100 401, 61, Church History Library, Salt Lake City and name listed among ministers of the gospel in "Kirtland, Ohio, June 3, 1836," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (June 1836): 335. See also Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 211–12. For insightful studies on Abel's life, consult Newell G. Bringham, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks Within Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 22–36; W. Kesler Jackson, *Elijah Abel: The Life and Times of a Black Priesthood Holder* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2013); Russell W. Stevenson, "'A Negro Preacher': The Worlds of Elijah Abels," *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 165–254; and Russell W. Stevenson, *Black Mormon: The Story of Elijah Ables* (Afton, Wyo.: self-pub., PrintStar, 2013).

was hereditary, as stipulated in Mormon scripture.¹² As the Church grew and requests for patriarchal blessings increased, Mormon founder Joseph Smith Jr. appointed local patriarchs to meet this demand.¹³ Available records do not indicate if local patriarchs blessed early Black Latter-day Saints. Joseph Smith Sr. most likely gave the first patriarchal blessing to an African American Latter-day Saint. Smith had few instructions to go on and fewer still on how to bless Blacks. There was not a lineage policy for them, despite Joseph Smith Jr.'s asserting that Black people derived from the "seed of Cain."¹⁴ Abel's patriarchal blessing reads more like a "father's blessing," proclaiming him an "orphan"—a pointed reference signifying that Abel's father was not a Latter-day Saint and could therefore not bless his son as the family patriarch. His blessing was full of warnings and admonitions. It also included blessings and promises. "Thou shalt be made equal to thy brethren and thy soul be white in eternity and thy robes glittering," the elder Smith promised.¹⁵ Abel's blessing did not include a designated lineage.¹⁶

Following Joseph Smith Sr.'s tenure as presiding patriarch from 1834 until the time of his death in 1840, his son Hyrum succeeded him in that

12. Doctrine and Covenants 124:91–93.

13. Bates and Smith, *Lost Legacy*, 39–40. For the office of local patriarch in Mormon scripture, see Doctrine and Covenants 107:39.

14. "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," 83, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/89>; Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church*, 7 vols., 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:445–46; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 288–89; and Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 41–43, 86–87.

15. Blessing of Elijah Abel by Joseph Smith Sr., c. 1836, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Lester Bush. Also in Marquardt, *Early Patriarchal Blessings*, 99.

16. H. Michael Marquardt has published many of Smith's blessings in *Early Patriarchal Blessings*. See also Marquardt's website, which includes blessings from Joseph Smith Sr.: <https://user.xmission.com/~research/mormonpdf/blessingsbyjssr.pdf>.

office, serving from 1840–1844. On March 6, 1844, Hyrum Smith gave a patriarchal blessing to a former slave named Anthony Stebbins assigning him the lineage of “Cainaan.”¹⁷ Smith also blessed Stebbins’s sister-in-law Jane Manning James, a faithful and loyal house servant to Joseph Smith Jr.¹⁸ James, baptized in Illinois in 1842, later relocated to Nauvoo, where she received her patriarchal blessing on May 11, 1844. Familiarly known as “Aunt Jane” by her fellow Mormons, Hyrum Smith blessed her that God would reveal the “Mysteries of the Kingdom” according to her “obedience” to God’s “requisitions.” He assigned her lineage through “Cainaan the Son of Ham,” proclaiming that if she lived worthily, God would lift the curse and “stamp . . . his own lineage” upon her.¹⁹

17. According to Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 101, n. 14. Unfortunately, not much is known about Stebbins.

18. For an insightful study of James’s life, see Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). See also Quincy D. Newell, “The Autobiography and Interview of Jane Elizabeth Manning James,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 2 (2013): 251–91; and Quincy D. Newell, “‘Is There No Blessing for Me?’: Jane James’s Construction of Space in Latter-day Saint History and Practice,” in *New Perspectives in Mormon Studies: Creating and Crossing Boundaries*, edited by Quincy D. Newell and Eric F. Mason (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 41–68.

19. Blessing of Jane Manning James by Hyrum Smith, May 11, 1844, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Max Perry Mueller. Mueller notes that “Aunt Jane” was beloved by Latter-day Saints “for her indefatigable faith in Mormonism and for her memories of Mormonism’s first prophet” (*Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 119). Reeve comments that when James died in 1908 she was “remembered as a well-respected person within the Mormon community” (*Religion of a Different Color*, 211). LDS apostles also referred to Jane Manning James as “Aunt Jane.” See Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, in “Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism,” compiled by Lester Bush, 192, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. This moniker, however, was deeply racist. According to historian Eric Foner, after the American Civil War many slaves rejected being called “boy,” “auntie,” or “uncle.” These former slaves wanted complete “independence from white control,” including from names that racist whites assigned to them (*Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* [New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005], 83). Fellow Mormons called Jane Manning James “Aunt Jane” as a term of endearment signifying her advanced

If pronouncements from the lineage of “Cainaan” characterized Hyrum Smith’s patriarchal blessings on Black Mormons, William Smith, the son of Joseph Smith Sr., appears to have departed from the practice during his brief tenure as Patriarch to the Church. On July 14, 1845, he gave Joseph T. Ball, an African American from Boston, a patriarchal blessing. Ball joined the LDS Church in Boston in 1832 and was ordained an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood in the mid-1830s in Kirtland, Ohio. In 1844 he was ordained a high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood and served as the branch president in Boston, making him the first African American ordained to that office and the first to preside over a Mormon congregation. In Ball’s blessing, Patriarch Smith told him that he was of “Royal Stock, to whom the blessings and promises were made, even Joseph[’s] tribe whose blessing are of heaven.” Smith further proclaimed that Ball would be “called to a mighty Prophet, [a] minister of peace [and] righteousness,” promising that he would reveal “the great mysteries of the kingdom and the Salvation of Israel’s God to a dying world.” Ball was most likely the first African American to be assigned a lineage through Joseph, one of Jacob’s sons in the House of Israel, and the father of Ephraim and Manasseh.²⁰

By the mid-nineteenth century when “Uncle” John Smith, brother of Joseph Smith Sr., became the fourth patriarch of the LDS Church, a position he occupied from 1849–1854, assignments from the lineage

age and beloved status within the Mormon community. Nonetheless, as Quincy D. Newell has argued in her forthcoming work on James, the term was rooted in white supremacy and the slave culture of nineteenth-century America. See *Your Sister in the Gospel: The Life of Jane Manning James, a Nineteenth-Century Black Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

20. Blessing of Joseph T. Ball by William Smith, July 14, 1845, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of H. Michael Marquardt. Also in Marquardt, *Early Patriarchal Blessings*, 320. For more on William Smith and patriarchal blessings, see Christine Elyse Blythe, “William Smith’s Patriarchal Blessings and Contested Authority in the Post-Martyrdom Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 60–95. Blythe does not discuss Smith’s views on lineage for Black Latter-day Saints.

of Cain and Ham became more consistent. This change largely resulted from the priesthood restriction that Brigham Young implemented in 1852. Young declared that “A man who has the African blood in him cannot hold one jot nor tittle of priesthood.” According to Young, “if the children of God . . . mingle their seed with the seed of Cain it would not only bring the curse of being deprived of the power of the priesthood upon themselves but they [will] entail it upon their children after them.”²¹

Affected by Young’s pronouncement, Uncle John Smith proclaimed a cursed lineage on at least two Black Latter-day Saints according to available records. On August 18, 1850, he gave a patriarchal blessing to John Burton, a Black man, and informed him that he was of the “Blood of Cainnain.” On October 4, 1851, he gave a patriarchal blessing to Q. Walker Lewis, an African American man from Boston. Lewis was baptized into the LDS Church in 1843 and ordained an elder by William Smith, the brother of Church founder Joseph Smith by 1844. Smith declared that Lewis was of the “tribe of Canan,” following the same lineage that his nephew pronounced for Jane Manning James some seven years earlier.²²

Uncle John Smith’s grandnephew John Smith also assigned Blacks lineage through the “tribe of Canan” after serving as the fifth patriarch of the Church from 1855–1911. The younger Smith, in fact, gave blessings to several Black Latter-day Saints declaring the “lineage of Cain and Ham,” though available records do not indicate who these recipients

21. Brigham Young address to the Utah Territorial Legislature, Feb. 5, 1852, box 48, folder 3, Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. See also Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 144–61; and Turner, *Brigham Young*, 218–29.

22. Blessing of John Burton by John Smith, Aug. 18, 1850, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Melvin C. Johnson. Not much is known about Burton. Walker Lewis blessing quoted in Connell O’Donovan, “The Mormon Priesthood Ban and Elder Q. Walker Lewis: An example for his more whiter brethren to follow,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 26, no. 1 (2006): 48–100 (quotations on 91–92); see also Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 101, n. 14.

were.²³ Also instructive, on October 10, 1889, patriarch John Smith granted Jane Manning James a second patriarchal blessing without assigning a lineage. The omission can be attributed to two factors: Most likely he knew she already had a designated lineage or perhaps he was not inspired to declare a new one.²⁴

Regardless, Manning's cursed lineage was reaffirmed thirteen years later when she sought the First Presidency's approval to be eternally sealed to the prophet Joseph Smith. Rejecting her request, LDS Church President Joseph F. Smith instructed that she would be sealed as a "servant" to Joseph Smith—this "done [in] a special ceremony having been prepared for that purpose."²⁵ The servant designation, well known to the early leaders of the Church, followed the biblical injunction that descendants of "Canaan shall be . . . servant[s]" to non-cursed lineages. Joseph F. Smith and Brigham Young clearly accepted this passage of scripture, as did Southerners who appropriated it to justify slavery. Young explained, "The Lord put a mark upon [the Negro], which is the flat nose and black skin. Trace mankind down to after the flood, and then

23. In 1970, Assistant Church Historian E. Earl Olson researched lineage assignments. He specifically noted that John Smith, son of Hyrum Smith, gave blessings assigning the lineage of "Cain and Ham" to several Black Latter-day Saints. His findings are recorded in the Council of Twelve minutes, May 21, 1970, box 63, folder 3, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. My thanks to the late Edward L. Kimball for facilitating access to his father's papers at the Church History Library.

24. Blessing of Jane Elizabeth Manning Perkins by John Smith, Oct. 10, 1889, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, courtesy of Max Perry Mueller (James's married name was Perkins). In *Lost Legacy*, Bates and Smith affirm that it was not uncommon during the early days of the Church for Latter-day Saints to receive second patriarchal blessings. As of 2018, the Church handbook allows for a second blessing, providing the recipient receives permission from the Quorum of the Twelve ("Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs," rev. ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016], 6).

25. Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, in Bush, "Compilation on the Negro," 192.

another curse is pronounced upon the same race—that they should be the ‘servant of servants’; and they will be, until that curse is removed.”²⁶

Well into the twentieth century, the ambiguous status of Black Latter-day Saints continued. This was complicated by the increased number of Blacks baptized into the Church. As Black and biracial Latter-day Saints trekked west and settled in Utah, they sought their temple and patriarchal blessings.²⁷ One of these converts, a man named “Church,” “inherited negro blood from his mother.” The patriarch informed him in his blessing that “he was of the lineage of Ephraim and that he should receive the priesthood and go on a mission.”²⁸ Cases like this prompted prolonged discussions within the Quorum of the Twelve. Apostles struggled with cases that came before them dealing with mixed-race members like Church. Could he hold the priesthood? Could he serve a mission? Was it appropriate to declare him the lineage of Ephraim? These and other questions increased after the American Civil War. In particular, the apostles were flummoxed by cases where a person with “a single drop of negro blood might be entirely white, yet one of his descendants might turn out to be a pronounced negro.” President

26. Genesis 9:25–27; and Brigham Young, Oct. 9, 1859, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:290–91. For more on the biblical justification of slavery, see Haynes, *Noah’s Curse*, chaps. 4–5.

27. For Blacks requesting their temple endowments and patriarchal blessings, see Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, in Bush, “Compilation on the Negro”; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 193–210; and Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 150–52. When the First Presidency denied permission for Black Latter-day Saints to receive their temple endowments, they sought to participate in other temple ordinances. For this point, see Tonya Reiter, “Black Saviors on Mount Zion: Proxy Baptisms and Latter-day Saints of African Descent,” *Journal of Mormon History* 43, no. 4 (2017): 100–23. For early Blacks and their devotion to the LDS church, see Kate B. Carter, *The Story of the Negro Pioneer* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1965). Precise estimates are unknown, but probably fewer than two hundred Blacks were Mormon in 1900. See also Ronald Coleman, “Blacks in Utah History: An Unknown Legacy,” in *The Peoples of Utah*, edited by Helen Z. Papanikolas (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1976), 115–40.

28. Council of Twelve minutes, Mar. 1, 1900, in Bush, “Compilation on the Negro,” 188.

Joseph F. Smith stated that the brethren should “determine each case on its merits,” but it was “his opinion that in all cases where the blood of Cain showed itself, however slight, the line should be drawn there.”²⁹

Without firm rules to determine lineage, some patriarchs even questioned whether or not Blacks could receive patriarchal blessings. In a letter to LDS apostle David O. McKay in 1935, a patriarch asked “whether a person having negro blood in his or her veins might receive a blessing from a patriarch” and McKay answered yes, adding: “A patriarch may pronounce upon anybody’s head the blessing to which that person may be entitled.” McKay, however, did not tell him how to declare lineage—only that “privileges . . . accorded to negroes” were limited in the Church.³⁰

The lack of direction from Church headquarters in declaring lineage created anguish for many patriarchs. Dozens of stories, both firsthand and anecdotal, illustrate the difficulty of pronouncing lineage on the Church’s relatively small but faithful Black population. For example, Orson Sperry, a patriarch from Utah, gave patriarchal blessings to an engaged couple who were soon to be married in the Salt Lake Temple. Sperry gave the young man “a very wonderful blessing,” but when he blessed the woman he put his hands on her head and struggled. He “paused,” then said, “I’m sorry, but there’s no blessing for you. You have the blood of Cain flowing in your veins and there’s no blessing for you.’ The young woman broke down and wept.” Sperry agonized over the incident, informing the couple that there would be no temple marriage because of her “negro lineage.” A similar incident occurred in Rexburg, Idaho, when a “handsome young man” requested a patriarchal blessing. A “Brother Knudsen” in the Patriarch to the Church’s office witnessed what happened. “The Church Patriarch, when he laid his hands upon

29. Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 2, 1902, *ibid.*, 191–92. See also Council of Twelve minutes, Aug. 22, 1895, *ibid.*, 187.

30. David O. McKay to Henry H. Hoff, Jan. 24, 1935, in *Minutes of the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1910–1951*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2010), 4:336.

his head, refused to give him a blessing. He told him that he had the blood of Cain flowing in his veins.”³¹

James Wallis, a traveling patriarch in the Canadian and Northern States mission, was similarly anguished about giving a blessing to a person of African descent and sought assistance from Church leaders in Salt Lake City. In 1934, the Duckworth family requested their patriarchal blessings, but they “had been accused of having negro blood in them.”³² Wallis agonized over the request, receiving no guidance from his ecclesiastical superiors on how to assign lineage when he was called as a patriarch in 1932. Uncertain how to proceed, he contacted apostle Charles Callis, who had extensive experience around “colored members of the Church,” having presided over the Southern States mission for nearly three decades. Callis sympathized with Wallis but did not offer assistance. Wallis then contacted apostle John A. Widtsoe, who asked LDS Church President Heber J. Grant for instruction. Grant responded through Widtsoe that it would be “alright to bless them, but as to their status in the future, that is a matter that is in the hands of the Lord.”³³

Why President Grant failed to provide a definitive answer on Black lineage can only be a matter of speculation. He clearly believed that Blacks had a cursed lineage. In private letters to Latter-day Saints and in private meetings with the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency, he made his views known.³⁴ Nevertheless, the LDS leader and

31. Sidney B. Sperry, who recorded patriarchal blessings for his grandfather Orson Sperry, recounted this experience to apostles Joseph Fielding Smith and Mark E. Petersen in the Salt Lake Temple, Oct. 7, 1954, “Discussion after a talk on Racial Prejudice,” 28, box 4, folder 7, William E. Berrett Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. For Knudsen’s experience, see *ibid.*, 29.

32. Wallis journal, Oct. 16, 1934, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

33. *Ibid.* See also Gloria Wallis Rytting, *James H. Wallis: Poet, Printer and Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: R & R Enterprises, 1989), 185–86.

34. Heber J. Grant diary, Oct. 1, 1890, 447, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Heber J. Grant to L. H. Wilkin, Jan. 28, 1928, box 63, folder 11, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State

perhaps his apostles recognized the pain that such declarations would cause Black members if patriarchs pronounced the lineage of Cain in their blessings. After all, one of the purposes of blessings was to provide comfort and guidance for one's life and being associated with a cursed race, much less a figure linked with Satan, was less than reassuring.³⁵ Apostle George F. Richards seemed to recognize the precarious position of Blacks when he noted in general conference in 1939: "The negro is an unfortunate man. He has been given a black skin. But that is nothing compared with that greater handicap that he is not permitted to receive the Priesthood and the ordinances of the temple, necessary to prepare men and women to enter into and enjoy a fulness of glory in the celestial kingdom." His fellow apostle Joseph Fielding Smith put it even more bluntly in 1931: "Not only was Cain called upon to suffer, but because of his wickedness he became the father of an inferior race. A curse placed upon him and that curse has been continued through his lineage and must do so while time endures. Millions of souls have come into this world cursed with a black skin and have been denied the privilege of Priesthood and the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel. These are the descendants of Cain."³⁶

University; "Minutes of a Special Meeting by President McKay," recounting President Grant's refusal to ordain to the priesthood a "negro man" because he was cursed (in McKay journal, Jan. 17, 1954, box 32, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah).

35. For the linkage of Blackness with Cain and Satan in Mormon discourse, see my essay "Whiteness Theology and the Evolution of Mormon Racial Teachings," in *The Mormon Church and its Gospel Topics Essays: The Scholarly Community Responds*, edited by Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, forthcoming).

36. George F. Richards, in Report of the Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apr. 1939 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, annual), 58–59 (hereafter cited as Conference Report); and Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection: Short Discourses on Gospel Themes*, 5th ed. (1931; repr., Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1945), 101–02.

Grant's ambiguous response to the question of Black lineage only heightened Wallis's anxiety. Wallis agonized over "the problem of the Duckworth family," stating in his journal that it "had caused me considerable anxiety and stress of mind, realizing as I sincerely do that with me rests the responsibility of declaring their lineage." With little guidance from Church headquarters, Wallis attempted to trace the family's genealogy to determine bloodlines. He also fasted and prayed hoping that God would reveal it to him. When that failed, he resolved to give them a blessing anyway, recording in his journal: "I am sure there is no objection to giving them a blessing of encouragement and comfort, leaving out all reference to lineage and sealing."³⁷

That same year Wallis was confronted with another challenging case when Herbert Augustus Ford, a light-skinned Black man, asked for his patriarchal blessing. Ford was originally from Saint Croix in the Virgin Islands, which had a long history of slavery and race-mixing.³⁸ According to his granddaughter, Patricia Ford, Herbert was denied the priesthood because "he was somewhat Negroid in appearance," which was "supposedly linked to his dark-skinned grandmother Mary Carden," although it was "unknown" if the grandmother had "negroid ancestry." Patricia Ford recalled that these assumptions were enough for priesthood leaders to deny "Herbert Ford and his descendants the Priesthood," which made her grandfather's life in the LDS Church "difficult." Wallis complicated the matter when he gave Ford his patriarchal blessing avowing that he was "of the blood of Abraham, through Ephraim and Manasseh." This declaration confused Ford even further because it did not resolve his

37. Wallis journal, Oct. 16, 1934.

38. See "An Interview Between Brother and Sister Herbert Augustus Ford and Brother Kelvin Thomas Waywell, High Councilman Advisor to the Stake President on Genealogy for the Hamilton Ontario Stake," taped on Oct. 21, 1973, Welland, Ontario, Canada, copy in box 32, folder 4, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

lineage. Rather, it placed him between two lineages, obfuscating the issue of whether or not he was eligible for the priesthood.³⁹

Anguished over his uncertain status in the Church, Ford wrote to the First Presidency seeking guidance. Although the letter is unavailable, its contents can be gleaned from the First Presidency's response. Joseph Anderson, the First Presidency secretary, replied that "The hearts of the Brethren bleed with sorrow over the lot of yourself and millions of others who find themselves in the same situation but for which neither the Brethren nor the Church is in any way responsible. I am directed by the Brethren to reply to you in the terms in which reply has been made to many others who find themselves in the same condition and who presented their cases to the Brethren with anguish equal to your own. Your statement is noted in which you say, 'I hope for the day when things might change, maybe not in my day, that all the people who may have confronted you in your lifetime on the same trouble will be free.'"⁴⁰

Ford's granddaughter Patricia experienced a similar fate. She was "denied a pronouncement of lineage by a patriarch aware of her situation" despite her protest that there was no evidence that she had "negro bloodlines." Not accepting the decision, she spent many years researching her genealogy to prove that she was not of the "restricted lineage."⁴¹ (In 1976, she presented evidence to the First Presidency convincing them that her family did not have African ancestry. The First Presidency granted permission for her to receive a second patriarchal blessing, which stated that she was from the "lineage of Ephraim." It is not clear if Herbert Ford received a second blessing, though the

39. Blessing of Herbert Augustus Ford by James H. Wallis, July 18, 1934, in "Herbert Augustus Ford Family" family history. See also "Letter from Patricia Ford outlining her research investigations," *ibid.*

40. Joseph Anderson to Herbert Ford, Apr. 10, 1951, copy in First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve minutes, 1951, in Bush, "Compilation on the Negro," 256.

41. Patricia Ford, "Herbert Augustus Ford and the LDS Priesthood," May 31, 1978, box 32, folder 4, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

First Presidency, because of his granddaughter's genealogical research, declared him eligible for the priesthood.⁴²)

As cases like these circulated throughout the Church, the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency began to discuss lineage more earnestly. Indeed, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of theories circulated among the Church leadership "about the significance of Israelite, Aryan, or Anglo-Saxon ancestry."⁴³ Hyrum G. Smith, the presiding patriarch from 1912–1932, delivered a pointed sermon in general conference in 1929, in which he stated that at "the present time in the Church the great majority of those receiving their blessings are declared to be of the house and lineage of Ephraim, while many others are designated as members of the house of Manasseh; but up to the present time we have discovered that those who are leaders in Israel, no matter where they come, are of Ephraim." In Smith's judgment, "Ephraim seems to prevail in the greater blessings, in the greater responsibilities, and in faithfulness to the Lord's work."⁴⁴

A year later, in a prominent Church publication called the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, an author proclaimed that descendants of Ephraim hailed from white European countries like Great Britain, Scandinavia, and Germany. Descendants of Ephraim "are of the Anglo-Saxon race," the author boldly asserted, "and they are upon the face of the whole earth, bearing the spirit of rule and dictation, to go forth from conquering to conquer."⁴⁵ LDS lesson manuals reinforced

42. Ibid. See also Theodore M. Burton, president of the Genealogical Society, to Ford's stake president, Elden Clark Olson, Feb. 6, 1975, and Theodore M. Burton and Grant Bangerter to President Elden Clark Olson, Sept. 30, 1976 (affirming that LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball lifted the restriction).

43. As perceptively noted in Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 26.

44. Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Day of Ephraim," in Conference Report, Apr. 7, 1929, 122–25; reprinted in *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 20 (April 1929): 123–26 (quotes on 124).

45. Archibald F. Bennett, "The Children of Ephraim," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 21 (January 1930): 69. According to Mauss, Bennett was

a whiteness theology as well, extolling Anglo-Saxons as the “chosen seed” of Israel.⁴⁶ So too, did apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, whose 1931 best-selling book *The Way to Perfection* outlined in vivid detail a racial hierarchy consisting of “favored” and “less favored lineages.” The outspoken Mormon apostle asserted that some lineages were blessed because of their “valiance” in a pre-earth life, while others bore the mark of a divine curse “for some act, or acts, performed before they were born.” According to Smith, Blacks were not preassigned to a “nation or tribe” through “the lineage of Abraham.” Rather, their lineage—that of Cain and Ham—placed them outside of God’s covenant blessings.⁴⁷

Smith’s teachings, couched in theological racism, echoed throughout the LDS Church, posing particular challenges for patriarchs when they gave blessings to African Americans, Black Africans, Australian Aborigines,

the executive secretary of the Utah Genealogical Society (*All Abraham’s Children*, 28).

46. “Our Lineage,” lessons 1 to 10 of the Course for First Year Senior Genealogical Classes (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1934); “Children of the Covenant,” A Lesson Book for Second Year Junior Genealogical Classes (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1937); “Youth and its Culture,” Manual for the Gleaner Department of the Y.W.M.I.A. (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1938); and “Birthright Blessings: Genealogical Training Class,” Sunday School Lessons for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Board, 1942).

47. Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 43, 46, 48, 105–06, 109–10. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, “The Negro and the Priesthood,” *Improvement Era* 27 (April 1924): 564–65; Alvin R. Dyer, “For What Purpose,” address to a missionary conference in Oslo, Norway, Mar. 18, 1961, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and Melvin J. Ballard, “Three Degrees of Glory,” discourse in the Ogden Tabernacle, Sept. 22, 1922, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. For background and context to *The Way to Perfection*, see Reid L. Neilson and Scott D. Marianno, “True and Faithful: Joseph Fielding Smith as Mormon Historian and Theologian,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 38–40. For a nuanced account of Mormon teachings on “the premortal world,” see Boyd Jay Petersen, “‘One Soul Shall Not Be Lost’: The War in Heaven in Mormon Thought,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 1–50.

Black Fijians, and Philippine Negritos.⁴⁸ Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century patriarchs had still received no guidance at all on how to address these “less favored lineages.” In 1942, apostle John A. Widtsoe affirmed in the *Improvement Era*, an official Church magazine, that patriarchal blessings “may declare lineage,” but he hinted that exceptions could be made for Black people. The following year the First Presidency made a similar statement, declaring that “Patriarchal blessings contemplate inspired declaration of lineage of the recipient.”⁴⁹ But the two statements were ambiguous with respect to Black lineage. Phrases like “may declare lineage” and “contemplate inspired declaration of lineage” left open the possibility that patriarchs could omit lineage altogether if they were not sufficiently inspired.

Allowing patriarchs to omit lineage resulted in Church leaders’ anxieties about determining who had “negro bloodlines” and who did

48. In the 1950s, the First Presidency cleared Negritos and Fijians for priesthood ordination and “reclassified [them] as Israelites.” For this point, see Armand L. Mauss, “The Fading of the Pharaoh’s Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban Against Blacks in the Mormon Church,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 12. See also R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Islands of the Sea: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 502. For Australian Aborigines, see Marjorie Newton, *Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia* (Laie, Hawaii: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1991), 209–10. For Black Africans, see Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 55–57, 75–91. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote *The Way to Perfection* during a time of intense racism in the United States. Some theologians used science, particularly eugenics, to justify racism. Others, like Smith (and other Mormon leaders), couched their racism in theology by appealing to scripture. Three books address these issues in some detail: Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); and David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*.

49. John A. Widtsoe, “What is the Meaning of Patriarchal Blessings?” *Improvement Era* 45 (January 1942): 33, 61, 63. Also published in John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 234. For the First Presidency statement, “Suggestions for Stake Patriarchs,” May 25, 1943, see James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1975), 6:194–96 (quotation on 194).

not.⁵⁰ Such anxieties were rooted in the difficulties that Americans in general had in defining African ancestry following the American Civil War and continuing into the early twentieth century. Some states stipulated that one-sixteenth African ancestry qualified for “negro status,” while other states placed it at one-eighth or one-twenty-fifth.⁵¹ Mormons, by contrast, followed the “one-drop” rule—based on lineage, not skin color.⁵² Harold B. Lee, as Church president, affirmed that “skin color is not what keeps the Negro from the Priesthood. It is strictly a matter

50. For an excellent expression of this problem, see Jeremy Talmage and Clinton D. Christensen, “Black, White, or Brown?: Racial Perceptions and the Priesthood Policy in Latin America,” *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 119–45; Richard E. Turley Jr. and Jeffrey G. Cannon, “A Faithful Band: Moses Mahlangu and the First Soweto Saints,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 9–38; and William Grant Bangerter, *These Things I Know: The Autobiography of William Grant Bangerter* (Salt Lake City: Voices and Images, 2013), 170. Bangerter, a mission president in Brazil in the 1950s, explained: “I very earnestly sought the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, and because of the mixture of African ancestry among Brazilian people, it was always very difficult to determine who would be eligible to hold the priesthood” (ibid.). Apostle David O. McKay explained to a mission president in Brazil that determining who had “negro blood” in South America “is not an easy problem to handle” (David O. McKay to Rulon S. Howells, June 29, 1935, Dorothy H. Ipsen Collection of Rulon S. Howells’s Missionary Papers, 1934–1949, Church History Library, Salt Lake City). First Presidency Secretary Hamer Reiser expressed a similar concern about South Africa (Reiser oral history interview with William G. Hartley, Oct. 16, 1974, ibid.).

51. Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell Us: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), chaps. 3–4; Peter Wallenstein, *Race, Sex, and the Freedom to Marry: Loving v. Virginia* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 42–43, 56–60; and Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chaps. 3–4.

52. For the “one-drop” rule, see Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 106; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, chap. 7; and Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, chap. 10. Several states also followed the “one-drop” rule. For this point, see Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 118–19, 140–54; and Wallenstein, *Race, Sex, and the Freedom to Marry*, 42, 55, 58.

of lineage and involves only African Negroes,” he declared. Lee further noted that “dark or black islanders, such as Fijians, Tongans, Samoans, or Maoris are all permitted full rights to the priesthood” since they do not descend from African ancestry.⁵³

Various Church presidents, in fact, claimed that any mixed blood between whites and Blacks would classify them a “negro” and therefore restrict them from priesthood and temple rituals. To that end, Mormon leaders went to great lengths during the twentieth century to determine bloodlines. J. Reuben Clark, a counselor to three Church presidents, asked apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, the Church Historian at the time and a leading doctrinal authority, to research if dark-skinned peoples in the Pacific Islands were of the “seed of Cain.” After extensive research, Smith claimed he did not know.⁵⁴ In some cases, Clark tried to determine Black ancestry through scientific means, collaborating with Albin Matson, an LDS doctor, to learn more about “negro blood.”⁵⁵ In other instances, LDS leaders instructed missionaries and members to conduct genealogical studies and “lineage lessons” to determine ancestry, particularly in South Africa and Brazil—two countries with a long history of

53. Harold B. Lee, quoted in John Keahey, “LDS Head Says Blacks to Achieve Full Status,” *Standard-Examiner* (Ogden, Utah), Sept. 24, 1973.

54. See J. Reuben Clark office diary, Mar. 19, 1960, box 22, folder 3, J. Reuben Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; First Presidency (Stephen L. Richards and J. Reuben Clark) to Joseph Fielding Smith, May 29, 1951, and Joseph Fielding Smith’s reply, June 8, 1951, both in box 17, folder 13, Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

55. In the 1950s, Clark and Matson exchanged several letters in which they discussed ways to “differentiate the blood of Negroes and other peoples by means of hereditary factors in human blood.” See Matson to Clark, July 2, 1954 and Clark’s reply, July 22, 1954, box 391, folder 7, J. Reuben Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; Matson to Clark, Oct. 20, 1958, Clark’s reply, Nov. 7, 1958, Matson to Clark, Dec. 16, 1958, Clark’s response, Jan. 9, 1958, all in “Clarkana” box 295, “Negro” folder, *ibid.* See also D. Michael Quinn, *Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 350–51.

race-mixing. In lineage lessons, missionaries were instructed to discern ancestry by discreetly evaluating the person's nose, face, lips, and other features that might reveal whether or not the person had "negro blood." They would also ask suspected persons if they could review their family photo albums.⁵⁶

Other leaders looked to patriarchs to solve the problem.⁵⁷ In Brazil, where lineage was difficult to determine, patriarchs became the final authority in determining priesthood eligibility. General Authorities instructed patriarchs that if they detected "the lineage of Cain," they were to refrain from declaring lineage. If, on the other hand, they felt prompted to declare one of the tribes of Israel, then the recipient was cleared for the priesthood and, as was often the case, missionary service. As one scholar wrote: "It was a very simple method to dispose of the difficult administrative problem of determining lineage in questionable cases."⁵⁸ Puerto Rico appeared to follow the same policy, as did other regions of the Church.⁵⁹

56. This practice took place in South Africa and Brazil. See South African Proselyting Plan (December 1951), compiled by Elder Gilbert G. Tobler, Mowbray, C. P. South Africa, discussion 13, 45–46, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. For Brazil, see "Lineage Lesson," Brazil North Mission, 1970, *ibid.* See also Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 102.

57. J. Reuben Clark acknowledged privately that in these racially-mixed countries there was no way to accurately determine bloodlines. He feared that bishops and stake presidents were conferring priesthood ordination on persons of African descent. For this point, see Council of Twelve minutes, Jan. 25, 1940, box 64, folder 5, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; also in box 78, folder 7, George Albert Smith Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

58. Mark L. Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 32.

59. Talmage and Christensen, "Black, White, or Brown?," 122–23. See also J. Reuben Clark office diary, Aug. 18, 1939, box 10, folder 5, J. Reuben Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University; and David O. McKay journal, Nov. 1, 1963, box 55, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

The policy, by contrast, differed in South Africa. In 1949, South African mission president Evan P. Wright asked the First Presidency if “a patriarchal blessing is sufficient evidence for ordination to the priesthood” and the First Presidency replied no.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in 1958, during a special meeting with patriarchs, Joseph Fielding Smith took a different position from the First Presidency. He instructed patriarchs that suspected “Negroes” could go to their patriarchs “who could declare lineage to see if they have the Negro blood.” Missionaries, in fact, were already doing just that. In 1953, a missionary in Chicago explained to apostle Spencer W. Kimball that a sixteen-year-old boy with “definite Negroid characteristics” received his blessing from a Patriarch Whowell. Members of the family showed “very definite Canaanite features,” the missionary reported. The family’s descendants “intermarried into many . . . other families,” making it difficult to determine the boy’s ancestry. So they sought the blessing of Patriarch Whowell, who confirmed their worst suspicion: “he could not give [the boy] the blessing of Israel because of his negro ancestry.”⁶¹

As one might suspect, patriarchs felt tremendous pressure to determine lineage. Oftentimes their declarations of lineage led to disappointment and confusion, as in 1962 when a patriarch told a newly-baptized convert, who looked “Hawaiian,” that he had “mixed lineage, which stemmed from dark-skinned people” in his family line. The patriarch explained in the blessing that “there is insufficient record or guidance for me to declare the certainty of your lineage.” The man, along with his wife who heard the blessing, was stunned, both because

60. Evan P. Wright to First Presidency (George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark, David O. McKay), Mar. 31, 1949 and First Presidency’s response, Aug. 31, 1949, both in box 64, folder 6, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

61. Digest of the minutes of the meeting of patriarchs of the Church with the General Authorities held in Barratt Hall, Salt Lake City, Utah, Saturday, Oct. 11, 1958, at 8:00 a.m. with President Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, box 64, folder 4, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and Elder Grant Farmer to Spencer W. Kimball, Sept. 12, 1953, box 64, folder 8, *ibid.*

the missionaries told them that the patriarch could resolve the man's priesthood eligibility and because it left his lineage in limbo. In protest, the wife wrote a blunt, angry letter to President McKay. "I think this church is bigoted, biased, and prejudiced," she lashed out. "My husband joined the church to try and clear up this mess," adding, "I don't know what you can do, but please try to help us. We are a happier family because of the church, and if it wasn't for this mess, we could be deliriously happy."⁶²

In some cases, local leaders resisted when patriarchs declared the lineage of Ephraim on dark-skinned Latter-day Saints. In 1961, Donald Hemmingway, a stake president in England, interviewed a "young man" who had "kinky hair and dark skin" and possibly even "Negro blood." Yet the patriarch proclaimed in his blessing that he descended from "the lineage of Ephraim," effectively clearing him for priesthood ordination. Hemmingway, troubled by the young man's outward appearance, refused to ordain him, at which point LDS Church President David O. McKay intervened and allowed the ordination to move forward.⁶³

By the 1950s and 1960s it was becoming clear that President McKay had a more progressive attitude about Black priesthood ordination than some of his more conservative brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve.⁶⁴ He asserted that "evidence of negro blood must be definite and positive," not

62. An identified bishop to an unidentified stake president, Dec. 26, 1962, and the recipient's wife to President David O. McKay, May 17, 1963, both in Matt Harris files (courtesy of Newell G. Bringham). She included long segments of her husband's patriarchal blessing in the letter to McKay. First Presidency Secretary A. Hamer Reiser responded on behalf of President McKay. He told the woman that the matter would be referred to her stake president. See Reiser to unidentified sister, May 29, 1963, *ibid.* President McKay also instructed the woman's stake president to investigate the matter to determine if her husband had "negro blood." The results of the stake president's investigation is not known. See McKay to unidentified stake president, June 3, 1963, *ibid.*

63. Donald William Hemmingway interview by Christen L. Schmutz, July 16, 1980, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

64. For this point, see Newell G. Bringham, "David O. McKay's Confrontation with Mormonism's Black Priesthood Ban," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 37, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2017): 1–11.

based on “rumor, surmise,” or innuendo. To that end, McKay instructed bishops and stake presidents to be generous in their judgement as long as the persons in question met worthiness standards. A “lack of evidence sufficient to sustain the presumption of negro blood is not enough to justify withholding the Priesthood from worthy and faithful men,” he averred.⁶⁵ McKay’s generosity of spirit manifested itself time and again in ad hoc cases that came before him. In 1954 he reversed a policy requiring South Africans to trace their genealogy back several generations to prove that they did not have Black ancestry.⁶⁶ He also encouraged bishops and stake presidents to err in favor of ordaining persons to the priesthood if there was insufficient evidence of Black blood.⁶⁷ He took the same liberal attitude with patriarchal blessings. When patriarchs blessed light-skinned people with “negro features” and declared them to be of the lineage of Ephraim, McKay let the persons in question advance in the priesthood.⁶⁸

Addressing these cases on an ad hoc basis became even more difficult in the decades following World War II. During the post-war years as the LDS Church expanded throughout the Pacific Islands, Europe, and South America, determining lineage was nearly impossible as biracial, light-skinned, and dark-skinned Latter-day Saints joined the Church in these racially-mixed countries. Without proper guidance on how to handle

65. David O. McKay to an unidentified stake president, June 3, 1963, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Newell G. Bringhurst).

66. “Minutes of Special Meeting by President McKay,” Jan. 17, 1954, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; also in box 32, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; and box 64, folder 8, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

67. For McKay’s overlooking Latter-day Saints suspected of having “negro lineage,” see Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 78–79; and Mary Lythgoe Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian* (Salt Lake City: Dialogue Foundation, 1995), 165–66.

68. See, for example, First Presidency (David O. McKay, Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner) to Bishop Bernard J. Price of Idaho Falls, Idaho, Apr. 16, 1964, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Newell G. Bringhurst)

these cases, patriarchs did not follow a consistent policy declaring lineage on persons with suspected African ancestry or persons whose African ancestry was unchallenged. Some patriarchs declared the lineage of Cain, some Ephraim, some Manasseh, some no lineage while others refused to grant blessings at all if they suspected them of having “negro blood.”

Concerned about the problem, apostle Joseph Fielding Smith called for a Church-wide meeting of patriarchs on October 11, 1958. They met at Barratt Hall on the campus of the LDS Business College in Salt Lake City. Smith, Spencer W. Kimball, Mark E. Petersen, Delbert L. Stapley, and LeGrand Richards, all members of the Quorum of the Twelve, attended the meeting along with patriarch Eldred G. Smith and members of the First Council of the Seventy S. Dilworth Young and Bruce R. McConkie. An undetermined number of patriarchs also attended the meeting. Smith cut right to the heart of the problem. There was “a problem which to me is serious,” he cautioned. “A Patriarch gave a blessing to an individual who had Negro blood in his veins and said you are of the House of Israel and entitled to all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A Negro cannot hold the priesthood and not holding the priesthood they cannot, until the Lord removes the restriction, enter into the exaltation of the Kingdom of God and that would not entitle them to all of the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is a very serious matter and we should be extremely careful to know the Lord is speaking to us because Negroes cannot receive the fullness.”⁶⁹

Smith reiterated his hardline position during the question-and-answer period when a patriarch asked about lineage. “We have a young man who joined the Church and there is a question as to his lineage. Is there any reason why they couldn’t call upon the patriarch to see if he could give it to them, to see whether or not they have colored blood?”

69. Digest of the minutes of the meeting of patriarchs of the Church with the General Authorities held in Barratt Hall, Salt Lake City, Utah, Saturday, Oct. 11, 1958, at 8:00 a.m. with President Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, box 64, folder 4, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

Smith replied that when cases were questioned of “a person suspected of having Negro blood,” it was permissible to “go to a patriarch” to determine lineage. “He has a right to inspiration.” But Smith did not address the specific lineage in his answer, only that patriarchs have a right to declare lineage.⁷⁰ Later, Smith clarified Black lineage in an *Improvement Era* article that was republished in a volume called *Answers to Gospel Questions*. Smith removed any ambiguity about Black lineage when he emphatically stated that the “Negro may have a patriarchal blessing, but it would declare him to be of the lineage of Cain or Canaan.”⁷¹

Smith’s unambiguous position on the lineage of the Church’s small, but noteworthy, Black population was echoed by his son-in-law Bruce R. McConkie, who shared his father-in-law’s penchant for doctrinal certainty. In his best-selling book *Mormon Doctrine*, published in 1958, McConkie, then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, expressed strong anti-Black views. “The negroes are not equal with other races where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are concerned,” he pronounced, “particularly the priesthood and the temple blessings that flow therefrom.” McConkie went on to state that “this inequality is not of man’s origin. It is the Lord’s doing . . . based on his eternal laws of justice.”⁷² McConkie further elaborated his views in a series of lectures given in 1967 to Mormon students at the University of Utah. “You automatically got the Priesthood if you belonged to the right lineage,” he candidly explained. “Negroes . . . are Negroes because of [the] pre-existence. They were less valiant. They did not develop the talent for spirituality that some others did. The House of Israel is the House of Israel because of our pre-existence.”⁷³

70. Ibid.

71. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–1966), 5:168. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, compiled by Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954–1956), 3:172.

72. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 477.

73. See McConkie’s religion lectures, “Patriarchal Order” and “Pre-Mortal Existence,” University of Utah Institute, 1967, AV 191, CD 1–3, Church His-

McConkie's forceful views reflected the essence of Mormon lineage theology, underscoring a stark racism that consigned Black Latter-day Saints to the margins. Without fully understanding how his teachings affected people of color, the Mormon leader made it emphatically clear where Blacks stood in God's racial order. A student asked McConkie if "a Negro [can] have a patriarchal blessing and the blessing tell him he's adopted into the House of Israel" and McConkie replied no. "Negroes can't go to the temple and . . . can't have these blessings."⁷⁴

Eldred G. Smith, LDS church patriarch from 1947–1979, shared Joseph Fielding Smith's and Bruce R. McConkie's doctrinal views affirming Black inferiority. When Eldred Smith was ordained as the Patriarch to the Church in 1947, then-Church President George Albert Smith instructed him "to declare lineage of those who come under your hands." For a period, Patriarch Smith declared the lineage of Blacks, though he was uncomfortable doing so. Nowhere was this more evident than with "Brother and Sister Hope," a Black couple from Cincinnati, Ohio, who flew to Salt Lake City in the spring of 1947 to receive their patriarchal blessings. According to apostle Spencer W. Kimball, the Hope family were "black members of the Church who were ostracized by their LDS congregation at Cincinnati and were asked by the branch president not to come back, so they held their own Sunday services in their home."⁷⁵ Feeling "somewhat perplexed" about how to declare lineage on the Hopes, Smith "spent the night in prayer and contemplation and finally felt impressed to indicate that they were 'associated with the line of Manasseh.'"⁷⁶

tory Library, Salt Lake City. See also McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 102, 314, 476–77, 530–31.

74. McConkie, "Patriarchal Order."

75. Eldred G. Smith's ordination blessing is included in Minutes of the Meetings of the First Presidency and Twelve, Apr. 10, 1947, in Minutes of the Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4:333. Biographical information on the Hopes can be found in Spencer W. Kimball journal, Oct. 20, 1947, reel 5, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

76. Ibid. Patriarch Smith also related this experience to BYU religion professor Roy W. Doxey, as recounted in James R. Clark's letter to his father, June 1, 1956,

But as more Black people sought their patriarchal blessings from Eldred Smith, he began to rethink how he blessed them.⁷⁷ In a general conference sermon in 1952, he proclaimed that Blacks were not direct descendants from the House of Israel and therefore not entitled to the priesthood or a declaration of lineage. Declarations of lineage or “assignments,” he explained, were only reserved for persons of a certain ancestry, whether born into the covenant or adopted into it through baptism into the Church. Thus, he reasoned, Blacks could not be adopted into the House of Israel and assigned a specific lineage because they were a cursed race. In another general conference sermon eight years later, he opined that “The blessings of Israel are leadership blessings and leadership blessings are the blessings of the priesthood.”⁷⁸ In 1964, he told Mormon students at the University of Utah that “every baptized member of the Church is entitled to a blessing with this declaration [of lineage] with one exception. And that, of course, is a Negro who can’t hold the Priesthood.” Smith went on to explain, “He can be a member of the church and he can get a blessing from a Patriarch but until we get different instructions from the Lord, a Negro does not hold the Priesthood. And so,” Smith concluded, “Priesthood blessings are leadership blessings; leadership blessings are the blessings of Israel.”⁷⁹

box 90, folder 5, Paul R. Cheesman Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

77. Smith affirmed that he had “given blessings to a number of Negroes who are members of the Church” (in Eldred G. Smith BYU devotional address, “A Patriarchal Blessing Defined,” Nov. 8, 1966, 10, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; copy also in box 211, folder 6, Ernest L. Wilkinson Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University).

78. Joseph Fielding Smith, “Patriarchal Order of the Priesthood,” *Improvement Era* 55 (June 1952): 425; and Joseph Fielding Smith, “Your Patriarchal Blessing,” *Improvement Era* 63 (June 1960): 417.

79. Eldred G. Smith to the LDS Student Association, University of Utah Institute of Religion, “Patriarchal Blessings,” Jan. 17, 1964, 3, copy in box 6, folder 10, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

Smith refined and indeed expanded his views on race in a 1966 devotional address at Brigham Young University. In that controversial address, the outspoken Mormon patriarch reaffirmed his belief that “leadership blessings are not for the Negro,” but then added a twist: “His is to be a servant. So as a servant he cannot be a leader.” Smith further opined that since Blacks were not eligible for the “blessings of Israel” they could not receive a true patriarchal blessing. Theirs would be “not . . . much different than the blessing that any bishop or home teacher or anyone else holding the priesthood would give, except that they would have the right to have it recorded and these are recorded.” Smith also stated that patriarchs were to omit lineage during blessings to Black people.⁸⁰

Patriarch Smith’s assertion that Blacks would be “servants” to whites eerily echoed the pro-slavery views that Brigham Young expressed in 1852 when he first announced the practice of restricting Blacks from the priesthood.⁸¹ Smith’s frank opinions shocked even BYU president Ernest Wilkinson, who was known for his hardline views on race.⁸² In response to Smith’s address, Wilkinson shared his concerns with apostle

80. Eldred G. Smith, “A Patriarchal Blessing Defined,” 9–10. William E. Berrett, BYU Vice President and Church Education System administrator, also taught that Blacks could not be given true patriarchal blessings since they could not receive “the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (“Race Problems,” Church History and Philosophy 245—Advanced Theology, July 10, 1956, Church History Library, Salt Lake City).

81. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 125–26; and Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 148–52.

82. Wilkinson’s racism was manifest most poignantly during the BYU athletic protests in the late 1960s. For Wilkinson’s reaction to the protests, see J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 3; Darron T. Smith, *When Race, Religion and Sport Collide: Black Athletes at BYU and Beyond* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 85–91; Gary James Bergera, “‘This Time of Crisis’: The Race-Based Anti-BYU Athletic Protests of 1968–1971,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 204–29.

Harold B. Lee and Church President David O. McKay.⁸³ In the midst of the turbulent civil rights era, Wilkinson worried about a public backlash against Mormon racial teachings. This also concerned General Authorities. In 1965, apostle Joseph Fielding Smith refused to allow BYU religion professor James R. Clark permission to publish the controversial 1949 First Presidency statement affirming Black priesthood denial in his multi-volume compilation *Messages of the First Presidency*, fearing it would bring undue critical attention to the Church.⁸⁴ At the same time, Church leaders reconsidered how they addressed letters from non-Latter-day Saints asking about “the Negroes holding the priesthood.” First Presidency counselor Hugh B. Brown stated “that since people do not believe in a pre-existence, such statements only lead to confusion,” and he recommended that they be stricken from letters explaining Church racial teachings. The First Presidency agreed with Brown and pledged to keep conversation about Black priesthood denial “clear, positive, and brief.”⁸⁵

In the 1960s, the Church found itself under increased scrutiny for its treatment of Blacks. Michigan governor George Romney, a devoted Latter-day Saint and a leading contender for national office, became the target of intense criticism in the national news media.⁸⁶ Of equal

83. As recorded in David O. McKay journal, Nov. 13, 1966, box 63, folder 7, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

84. Smith instructed Clark not to publish any statements the First Presidency issued “during controversial periods in Church history since they would probably be misunderstood today” (in Clark’s “Memorandum on a trip to see President Joseph Fielding Smith,” June 29, 1964, box 7, folder 9, James R. Clark Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University).

85. First Presidency Minutes, Mar. 1, 1968, box 67, folder 3, David O. McKay Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

86. For criticisms of Romney and Mormon racial teachings, see J. B. Haws, “When Mormonism Mattered Less in Presidential Politics: George Romney’s 1968 Window of Possibilities,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 114; Haws, *Mormon Image in the American Mind*, 38-40; and Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 75, 79.

concern were naysayers within the Church, who offered pointed criticisms of Mormon racial teachings. Included in this number were Sterling McMurrin and Stuart Udall, both high-ranking government officials in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, who published sharply-worded statements condemning LDS racial doctrine. Apostle Spencer W. Kimball lamented such attacks, noting that “there are many letters from embarrassed people, much of it negative.”⁸⁷

It was in this context that Patriarch Smith gave his controversial BYU address. President McKay, upset with Patriarch Smith for expressing such extremist views, “directed that no part of [Smith’s] address be printed.”⁸⁸ Apostle Mark E. Petersen experienced similar criticism twelve years earlier when he gave a controversial address to religion instructors at BYU. In it, he said that if a “Negro is faithful all his days he can and will enter the Celestial Kingdom,” but “will go there as a servant.”⁸⁹ Concerned Latter-day Saints condemned Petersen’s sermon as a “gross misreading

87. Spencer W. Kimball to Edward L. Kimball, June 1963, box 63, folder 6, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. Sterling M. McMurrin served in the Kennedy administration as the Commissioner of Education. Stewart L. Udall served in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations as the Secretary of the Interior. For their criticisms of Mormon racial teachings, see McMurrin’s addresses to the NAACP, Mar. 8, 1960, box 220, folder 2 and June 21, 1968, box 289, folder 2, both in Sterling McMurrin Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah; Udall to First Presidency, Sept. 18, 1961, box 209, folder 3, Stuart L. Udall Papers, Special Collections, University of Arizona; and Udall letter to the editor, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1967): 5–7.

88. McKay journal, Nov. 13, 1966. Wilkinson informed Eldred Smith that President McKay did not want the address published “because of the present turmoil over the Negro question.” See Wilkinson to Smith, November 25, 1966, box 378, folder 3, Ernest L. Wilkinson Presidential Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

89. Mark E. Petersen, “Race Problems As They Affect the Church,” address given to religious educators at Brigham Young University, Aug. 17, 1954, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

of LDS scripture.” One critic labeled it as “reminiscent of the Klan.”⁹⁰ Of course, the teaching did not originate with Smith or Petersen. They had merely repeated what Joseph Fielding Smith, Joseph F. Smith, and Brigham Young had said before, as well as various pro-slavery Protestant ministers from the nineteenth century.⁹¹ But Smith and Petersen said it at a time when the LDS Church was under siege for its racial teachings.

Patriarch Smith’s statements on Black lineage only heightened an already-tense problem within the Church. “We have these conditions by the thousands in the United States,” he candidly admitted, “and are getting more of them. If they have any blood of the Negro at all in their line, in their veins at all, they are not entitled to the blessings of the Priesthood, which would eliminate them from receiving these Patriarchal Blessings.”⁹² In a 1968 document called “Instructions to Patriarchs,” the apostles tried to clarify how Black lineage should be handled. While they did not identify the specific lineage for persons suspected of having African bloodlines, they made it emphatically clear that Blacks were not to receive the blessings of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” and therefore patriarchs should not declare that lineage on persons with “Negro blood.” The statement was essentially lifted from the 1958 meeting minutes with

90. LDS Bishop J. D. Williams condemned Petersen’s sermon as a “gross misreading of LDS scripture” in “Analysis of ‘Race Problems—As They Affect the Church,’” 1954, box 24, folder 2, J. D. Williams Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. LDS sociologist O. Kendall White linked the talk with the Klan (in White, “Mormonism’s Anti-Black Policy and Prospects for Change,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 29, no. 4 [1972]: 44. For more on the backlash against Petersen, see Harris and Bringham, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 68–69, 172–73, n. 38–39.

91. Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 109–10; Joseph F. Smith, Council of Twelve minutes, Aug. 18, 1900, in Bush, “Compilation on the Negro,” 191–92; Brigham Young, Feb. 18, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:184. On pro-slavery Protestant ministers, see generally Haynes, *Noah’s Curse*; Kidd, *Forging of Races*; Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin*; Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*.

92. Smith address to the LDS Student Association, University of Utah Institute of Religion, “Patriarchal Blessings,” 8.

Joseph Fielding Smith's instruction to patriarchs. There was no new counsel—just a reaffirmation of what had been said earlier.⁹³

Not surprisingly, the 1968 "Instructions to Patriarchs" did not clear up the matter. Arguably it created more confusion because it failed to address the uncertainty of Black lineage. To that end, the apostles convened a special meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve in March 1970 to resolve the issue. They reviewed the minutes from Joseph Fielding Smith's 1958 meeting with patriarchs. Apostle Richard L. Evans correctly identified the problem when he said that the 1958 meeting "clearly says that the Negroes cannot receive all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but it does not tell the patriarch what lineage they should declare." Evans said he "researched this with Earl Olson, Assistant Church Historian, and in only a few blessings over many years has the lineage of Ham been declared." Apostle Gordon B. Hinckley "said he had some additional help on this matter" that he would share at another meeting.⁹⁴

The following week the Twelve met again. The meeting was focused exclusively on "the Negro and Patriarchal Blessings." As promised, Hinckley shared his findings. He described "some of the blessings given by [Patriarch] John Smith, in May 1895, when he stated that the individual receiving the blessing was of the lineage of Ham." Hinckley also "referred to a number of other blessings which had been given by various patriarchs in the Church in which the lineage of Ham was stipulated in their blessings." The meeting minutes record that "It was discussed and it was the feeling of the Brethren that it is difficult to prescribe some of these lineages and some of the blessings, that this is a matter which should be left to the patriarch under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost." Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, who harbored negative views about Black people, reminded his colleagues that "one of the great purposes of a patriarchal blessing is to give the lineage and on many occasions when

93. "Instructions to Patriarchs," 1968, copy in box 6, folder 10, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

94. Council of Twelve minutes, May 14, 1970, box 63, folder 3, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

the lineage is not indicated, it becomes a real concern for the recipient of the blessing.” Unable to resolve their differences, the apostles decided to discuss it at another meeting in the Council of the Twelve.⁹⁵

From these two quorum meetings it is clear that members of the Twelve could not agree on a lineage policy. Thus, the apostles placed the burden of determining lineage back on the patriarchs themselves. The meetings also revealed that certain members of the Twelve clashed with Patriarch Smith over his responsibilities in the Office of the Patriarch. Indeed, the differences between the apostles and Eldred Smith revealed deep fissures within Church leadership.⁹⁶ In 1971, Smith met with the apostles to resolve their differences. Apostle Spencer W. Kimball characterized the patriarch as “argumentative” during the meeting.⁹⁷ The tension between the members of the Twelve and Smith was palpable and perhaps irresolvable. Whereas Smith instructed that Black members should not receive lineage in their blessings, some apostles insisted they should. And whereas Patriarch Smith viewed blessings for Black Latter-day Saints as “father’s blessings,” certain apostles contested that characterization.

The apostles’ inability to reach a consensus on Black lineage with Patriarch Smith and within the Quorum of the Twelve posed further problems for patriarchs. At a patriarch’s meeting on April 6, 1973, some 114 patriarchs met in Salt Lake City with apostles Delbert L. Stapley and

95. Council of Twelve minutes, May 21, 1970, *ibid.* For Benson’s anti-Black views, see my article “Martin Luther King, Civil Rights, and Perceptions of a ‘Communist Conspiracy,’” in *Thunder from the Right: Ezra Taft Benson in Mormonism and Politics*, edited by Matthew L. Harris (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

96. There had been a longstanding tension between Eldred Smith and various apostles over many issues over many years. For this point, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 116–31; Smith and Bates, *Lost Legacy*, chaps. 8–9; and Marquardt, *Later Patriarchal Blessings*, xxxi–liv.

97. Spencer W. Kimball journal, May 21, 1971, reel 35, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

LeGrand Richards, along with Eldred Smith. The questions immediately turned to lineage. “In the immediate future I am going to have the opportunity of giving a blessing to a young Negro,” a patriarch asked. “I am very apprehensive about the declaration of lineage.” Stapley, seemingly unconcerned about Benson’s assertion that lineage should be stated, opined that he “wouldn’t declare the lineage in a case of that kind.” He instructed the patriarch to just tell them “they would obtain their blessings through the descendants of Abraham.” He admitted his counsel was “questionable,” but he felt he had no other choice.⁹⁸

Patriarch Smith responded, reiterating his previously-stated views on race from his controversial BYU talk. “I have given a number of blessings to Negro members of the Church. But if you give them the declaration of the blessings of Israel, you are giving them the right to the priesthood because the blessings of Israel are leadership blessings, which is priesthood. So, you give them a father’s blessing or a blessing by a patriarch. You record it the same as a patriarchal blessing, but you cannot give them any blessings of Israel.” Smith reaffirmed that there should be “No declaration of lineage.”⁹⁹

Stapley claimed that Smith did not interpret his position accurately and let him know. “I didn’t say they were descendants of Abraham. I said they receive blessings through the descendants of Abraham.” The exchange had an unnerving quality about it and revealed that Church leaders had different notions of lineage for Black Latter-day Saints. Complicating matters further, a patriarch asked if “lineage is not declared” could the patriarch add “an addendum to the blessing,” to which Stapley replied that he could, clearly revealing his differences with Smith. But the most pointed question focused on the precise lineage that patriarchs felt inspired to declare. “If the spirit is to indicate a lineage of Cain, is it not possible to stipulate that?” a well-intentioned patriarch asked. LeGrand Richards, who was known in Church circles for his volubility,

98. “Patriarchs’ Meeting Minutes,” Apr. 6, 1973, copy in box 4, folder 3, Irene Bates Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

99. *Ibid.*

had remained quiet up to this point. Richards responded, “I don’t think we ever ought to say anything that will discourage people. I wouldn’t tell them that they are a descendant of Cain. You can get around it easier than that, and then it won’t make them feel so bad.”¹⁰⁰

The winds in the Church were certainly shifting. Richards understood that declaring the lineage of Cain would “discourage [Black] people.” Ezra Taft Benson said that omitting lineage made Black members uncomfortable. More to the point: the apostles had been informed about the damaging effects of LDS racial teachings. In a letter written in 1970, just a few months after the apostles discussed Blacks and patriarchal blessings in their quorum meeting, University of Utah graduate student Sharon Pugsley, a practicing Latter-day Saint, wrote a spirited letter to the apostles. “My primary concern about the teaching that Negroes have been cursed by God . . . is the incalculable potential it has for inflicting psychological damage on persons who are affected by it.” She continued: “I’m not saying that our position with regard to the Negroes is unconstitutional or illegal. I’m saying that it is immoral. It is immoral because it is degrading to certain human beings. I think it would be extremely difficult for a Negro to grow up in our country without being somewhat paranoid—regardless of the Mormon Church. But our Church, instead of being a help to him, is just one more hurt.”¹⁰¹

To underscore the point, Pugsley sent the apostles a copy of the *Utah Daily Chronicle*, the student newspaper at the University of Utah. In it, she highlighted an ad she placed that said “Attention L.D.S.” The statement called for a financial contribution to help Blacks:

As a Mormon concerned about racial problems, I am contributing \$_____ to _____. Although a financial gift can never erase the psychological hurt a child may have suffered while growing up among people who believe and teach that he and all other members of his race have been cursed by God, perhaps this gesture will be serve as

100. Ibid.

101. Sharon Pugsley to the Quorum of the Twelve, Aug. 20, 1970, box 9, folder 7, Joseph Fielding Smith Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

evidence of my hope that the above-mentioned belief with its accompanying attitudes and practices may be changed very soon.

Pugsley urged Latter-day Saints to support a charity run by Coretta Scott King, Dr. Martin Luther King's widow.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, as criticisms against LDS racial teachings persisted, the First Presidency continued to field questions about Black lineage. Some Church leaders, unaware that Blacks could even receive their blessings, queried LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball. In 1974, J. Duane Dudley, a stake president in Provo, Utah, interviewed a woman of "Negro descent" and wondered "if she can receive a blessing." He asked if there are "any special instructions to the patriarch." Specifically, Dudley wanted to know if there is "any particular statement that should be made about her lineage, such as using the words 'adopted' into one of the tribes of the House of Israel. Could she appropriately be promised all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?" he asked.¹⁰³ A few years earlier Kimball himself had already queried the First Presidency over these kinds of questions when he was the Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve. First Presidency secretary Joseph Anderson responded that "Negro members may properly receive patriarchal blessings," noting that "the patriarch is entitled to inspiration in declaring the lineage of the one to whom the blessing is given." But Blacks could not be adopted into the House of Israel, he affirmed. He was "directed to tell [Kimball] that this is not the doctrine of the Church."¹⁰⁴

Now, as Church president, Spencer W. Kimball fielded questions about Black lineage. He agonized over these questions and spent many hours in

102. *Utah Dailey Chronicle*, Nov. 19, 1969, copy in *ibid*.

103. J. Duane Dudley to First Presidency (Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney), May 13, 1974, box 32, folder 2, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

104. Joseph Anderson to Spencer W. Kimball, May 28, 1971, box 64, folder 2, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

prayer contemplating the issue.¹⁰⁵ Kimball explained to President Dudley that “Negro members may properly receive patriarchal blessings and the patriarch is entitled to inspiration in declaring lineage of the one to whom the blessing is given.” He further noted that patriarchal blessings “should contain” a declaration of lineage, although he did not state what that lineage was.¹⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, the lack of direction from Church leaders continued to frustrate patriarchs who needed guidance from Church headquarters. Apostle L. Tom Perry recognized the problem and wrote a frank report after visiting a stake in Brazil in May 1976. Perry said that he “found a problem in interviewing . . . two patriarchs. One had been giving lineage from the line of Israel to the Negroes.” Other patriarchs, he was told, pronounced “lineage from many tribes.” The patriarchs he interviewed “suggested a study be made of the blessings on file in the Historians office to see if there is a problem which exists on declaring lineage in Brazil.” Perry concurred “that such a survey be made.”¹⁰⁷

A survey was, in fact, already underway when Perry made his report to the First Presidency. Two months earlier in February 1976, apostle Boyd

105. For two excellent studies depicting President Kimball’s views on Blacks, priesthood, and lineage, see Edward L. Kimball, “Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 5–85; Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball (Working Draft)* (Salt Lake City: Benchmark Books, 2009), chaps. 20–22. My research in the Kimball papers reveals his sensitivity to Blacks and lineage.

106. First Presidency (Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney) to J. Duane Dudley, May 17, 1974, box 32, folder 2, David John Buerger Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Kimball was remarkably consistent in this position. In 1956, he counseled patriarch George E. Jorgensen “that the matter of lineage for such a person would have to be left to the inspiration of the patriarch” (as quoted from a conversation that BYU religion professor James R. Clark had with Patriarch Jorgensen, June 1, 1956, box 90, folder 5, Paul R. Cheesman Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University).

107. L. Tom Perry, “Quarterly Stake Conference Report by General Authorities of the Santo André Stake Conference,” May 15–16, 1976, Matt Harris files (courtesy of Mark Grover of BYU).

K. Packer asked the Church research department to examine “precedents for stake patriarchs’ giving blessings outside their stake boundaries; information on declaring lineage in patriarchal blessings; and information on whether fathers have the right to declare lineage in patriarchal blessings on their children.”¹⁰⁸ While the results of Packer’s request are unknown, the fact that lineage was still a concern for Church leaders as late as 1976 illustrates a troubling problem in the LDS Church. And that problem persisted even after President Kimball lifted the priesthood and temple ban in 1978. Most importantly, the priesthood revelation did not resolve the question of whether or not Blacks were of a cursed lineage. A new edition of “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs” that the Church published in 1981 avoided the subject altogether.¹⁰⁹

Nor did the apostles mend their differences with Patriarch Smith. The priesthood revelation only widened the gulf between them, culminating in President Kimball’s decision to place Smith on emeritus status and permanently abolish the Office of the Patriarch in 1979. While the patriarch’s son, Gary Smith, writes that it is “not known what dynamics might have combined to cause Spencer Kimball to retire the office of Church Patriarch,” a major cause appears to be the patriarch’s obstinacy over the lineage issue, which put him at loggerheads with other General Authorities.¹¹⁰ Smith stubbornly insisted that Blacks should not receive an assignment of lineage despite the fact that they could now attend the temple and hold

108. Bates and Smith, *Lost Legacy*, 214, 220, n. 49.

109. See “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs,” in Marquardt, *Later Patriarchal Blessings*, 565–66. On the question of the priesthood revelation not resolving Black lineage, see Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 118.

110. President Kimball “retired” the Office of the Patriarch in 1979 and named Eldred Smith “Patriarch Emeritus.” Bates and Smith indicate that it is “not known what dynamics might have combined to cause Spencer Kimball to retire the office of Church Patriarch” (*Lost Legacy*, 216). They speculate that “perhaps it was the desire to end more than a century of tension over the proper parameters of authority for the office and to finally put to rest the question of lineal rights of succession.” For an insightful discussion of the matter, see Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride (Working Draft)*, 406–09.

the priesthood. He also asserted that Blacks could not be adopted into the House of Israel, which contrasted sharply with the apostles' teachings.¹¹¹

For the apostles, however, the priesthood revelation changed the status of Blacks within the House of Israel, even as Church leaders remained steadfast in their belief that God had cursed them.¹¹² The revelation prompted the Church hierarchy to rethink the place of Blacks within the Church, particularly their status as God's covenant people. After 1978, apostles proclaimed that Blacks could be "adopted into the House of Israel." They could now experience all the rights and privileges that descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh enjoyed, including leadership in the Church. Theologically, this meant that whatever lineage Blacks had before 1978 no longer mattered: as bearers of the priesthood and participants in the sacred ordinances of the temple, they were now equal with God's favored lineages.¹¹³

In a private memo to President Kimball, apostle Bruce R. McConkie provided a theological rationale for the change. "Negro blood," McConkie

111. The ideas expressed in this section were conveyed to me in an email on February 18, 2018, by a person with direct knowledge of Patriarch Smith's views. Because of the sensitivity of the matter, I have chosen not to identify this person.

112. Books promoting the divine curse continued to circulate in the Church well after the priesthood revelation. This includes Smith, *Way to Perfection*; Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*; and McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*. It was not until 2013 that the Church officially renounced its long-standing teaching that Blacks bore the mark of a divine curse. For two expressions of this statement, see "Race and the Priesthood," *Gospel Topics*, Dec. 2013, <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>; and Matthew L. Harris, "Mormonism's Problematic Racial Past and the Evolution of the Divine-Curse Doctrine," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 33, no. 1 (2013): 90–114.

113. Two sermons both with the same title illustrates this point. See Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike Unto God," address given at a Book of Mormon symposium for Seminary and Institute instructors at Brigham Young University, Aug. 18, 1978, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; and Howard W. Hunter, "All Are Alike Unto God," devotional assembly address at Brigham Young University, Feb. 4, 1979, available at https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/howard-w-hunter_all-alike-unto-god.

reasoned, would be “purged out of a human soul by baptism [and] the receipt of the Holy Ghost and [by] personal righteousness.” Blacks would be adopted into the House of Israel as the “seed of Abraham,” thereby qualifying for the blessings of exaltation.¹¹⁴ Apostle James E. Faust also addressed the point, asserting that “it really makes no difference if the blessings of the House of Israel come through the lineage or through the spirit of adoption.” All could be counted as the “blood of Israel,” whether figuratively or literally. A Church manual further explained: “Converts to the Church are Israelites either by blood or adoption.”¹¹⁵

Nagging questions about lineage persisted, however. “What lineage were the Blacks?” a high priest asked a patriarch just weeks after the priesthood ban ended. The patriarch responded that he “asked some general authorities and other patriarchs about it and they will only say ‘It’s between you and the Lord.’” Meanwhile, some patriarchs expressed trepidation about having “to discern a declaration of lineage for a black

114. Bruce R. McConkie memo to Spencer W. Kimball, “Doctrinal Basis for Conferring the Melchizedek Priesthood Upon the Negroes,” March 1978, box 64, folder 3, Spencer W. Kimball Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City. The context for this memo is important. In the months leading up to the priesthood revelation, President Kimball asked the apostles to prepare written memorandums justifying priesthood ordination on Black people. See Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride (Working Draft)*, 345; and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 374–75. McConkie’s assertion that Gentile “blood” could be purged by baptism echoed Joseph Smith’s teachings. See Smith’s writings of June 27, 1839, in “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842],” 8, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/543>. Smith applied the term “Gentile blood” more broadly; McConkie associated it with “Negro” converts.

115. James E. Faust, “Patriarchal Blessings,” Brigham Young University devotional, Mar. 30, 1980, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/james-e-faust_patriarchal-blessings; and *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 273. See also Daniel H. Ludlow, “Of the House of Israel,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1991, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1991/01/of-the-house-of-israel?lang=eng>.

person.”¹¹⁶ Other Latter-day Saints, insensitive to Mormon racial teachings, asked Blacks about their lineage. “So what’s your lineage?” a white Latter-day Saint queried Keith Hamilton, a newly-baptized Black convert. The “seed of Cain,” Hamilton sarcastically replied. “The brother looked at his embarrassed wife and triumphantly proclaimed, ‘See, I told you.’”¹¹⁷

In other instances, the priesthood revelation opened up new possibilities for Black Latter-day Saints who were denied lineage in their initial blessings. Ruffin Bridgforth, Eugene Orr, and Darius Gray, the inaugural presidency of the Genesis Group, a Black Latter-day Saint support group, each experienced this. Orr and Gray, troubled over the omission, contacted Eldred Smith, the man who gave them their blessings. Orr demanded to know why he “was given no lineage” and Smith could only reply that he did not receive a “burning in his bosom” during the blessing. Smith’s less-than-frank response frustrated Orr, prompting him to ask the patriarch why he “denied [himself] the right to receive the burning in the bosom?”¹¹⁸ Gray expressed frustration too. “When I received my patriarchal blessing in 1966 it did not include lineage,” Gray recalled. “That’s the purpose of a patriarchal blessing and you’re entitled to go back and get a second patriarchal blessing,” his friends explained. Gray asked for a second blessing, but Patriarch Smith demurred. “It isn’t time yet,” Smith replied cryptically, confusing Gray. “I didn’t know if it was because of my race or what,” Gray affirmed. He reported that “it took twenty some years to approach [Patriarch Smith] again at the

116. As related in LDS Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington’s journal, June 25, 1978, box 33, folder 4, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University. Keith N. Hamilton, *Last Laborer: Thoughts and Reflections of a Black Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Ammon Works, 2011), 68 (my thanks to Hamilton for sharing a copy of his book).

117. *Ibid.*, 69.

118. Eugene Orr interview with H. Michael Marquardt, Nov. 14, 1971, box 6, folder 3, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah. Also in Harris and Bringhurst, *Mormon Church and Blacks*, 90–91.

urging of my then-Bishop and I received a second patriarchal blessing and my lineage [was] declared.”¹¹⁹

Other Black Latter-day Saints also received a declaration of lineage after the priesthood revelation. “My Bl[ack] LDS fam[ily], incl[uding] Darius Gray, Joseph Freeman, Sis Jeri Harwell [and] many others all went [and] got lineage after 1978,” declared Zandra Vranes, a Black Latter-day Saint, in 2017.¹²⁰ But lineage remained confusing and inconsistent for many Black Latter-day Saints despite the Church’s quasi-official teaching that Blacks could now be adopted into the House of Israel. During the 1980s, a patriarch noted that he received “a specific directive from General Authorities of the Church” on how to deal with Black lineage. “Any descendant of negroid ancestry receiving a Patriarchal Blessing as regarding the declaration of lineage the promises need not include the tribal lineage, but . . . include the ‘seed of Abraham’ as sufficient. Such confirms all the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant and that is sufficient. No greater blessing of lineage can be applied.”¹²¹ In 1994, it was reported that “black church members” in South Africa “were to be assigned to the lineage of Ephraim as a matter of church policy.”¹²² By contrast, a Latter-day Saint stated that he was “aware of black people in the United

119. Darius Gray and Margaret Young, “No Johnny-Come-Lately: The 182-Year-Long BLACK Mormon Moment,” address at FairMormon conference, August 2–3, 2012, <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2012/no-johnny-come-lately-the-182-year-long-black-mormon-moment>. Gray also discusses his patriarchal blessing in an oral history interview with Dennis and Elizabeth Haslem, Dec. 4, 1971, box 1, folder 7, African American Oral History Project, 1971–1973, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

120. Sistas in Zion (@SISTASinZION), “It was church policy,” Twitter, June 7, 2017, 1:19 p.m., <https://twitter.com/SISTASinZION/status/872548570087301120>.

121. As quoted in Joseph Stuart, “Patriarchal Blessings, Lineage, and Race: Historical Background and Survey,” *Juvenile Instructor* (blog), June 8, 2017, <http://juvenileinstructor.org/patriarchal-blessings-lineage-and-race-historical-background-and-a-survey>.

122. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children*, 40, n. 32; Armand Mauss, email message to author, Feb. 2, 2018.

Kingdom whose patriarchs declared their lineage of ‘Ham’ even after the momentous and long overdue 1978 change” lifting the priesthood restriction.¹²³ Another Latter-day Saint, a biracial man, reported that his patriarchal blessing in 1987 “specifically [omitted] reference to belonging to any tribe but [offered] him blessings ‘by reason of adoption into the House of Israel.’” Confused, the young man sought another blessing in 1991 prior to his LDS mission, and the patriarch explained that his lineage “was that of Cain and that he would be entitled to the blessings of Israel only by way of adoption into the House of Israel.” This lineage designation disturbed the young missionary who “lived believing he was truly a descendant of Cain.” He grew weary trying “to prove himself worthy of the fullness of the Lord’s blessings.”¹²⁴

These stories and more underscore the difficult experience that many Black Latter-day Saints undergo when they receive their patriarchal blessings. Indeed, some Black Mormons feel uncomfortable and ashamed when denied lineage or given vague promises through “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”¹²⁵ Insensitive patriarchs are only part of the problem, though. The

123. As quoted in Stuart, “Patriarchal Blessings, Lineage, and Race” and confirmed in an email message to author, Feb. 14, 2018. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, I have chosen to keep the person’s identity anonymous.

124. John Dehlin, “Dustin Jones and the Lingering Legacy of the LDS Negro Doctrine,” *Mormon Stories* (podcast), May 31, 2011, <http://www.mormonstories.org/256-258-dustin-jones-and-the-lingering-legacy-of-the-lds-negro-doctrine>.

125. A point conveyed to me by numerous Black Latter-day Saints. After 1978, many Black Latter-day Saints claim lineage through Ephraim and Manasseh by adoption into the House of Israel—this according to persons knowledgeable on the subject. Because of the sensitivity of the matter, I have agreed not to identify them. Also instructive is that Black Mormons who have written about their conversion to the LDS Church have not discussed lineage in their books. See, for example, Alan Gerald Cherry, *It’s You and Me, Lord!* (Provo: Trilogy Arts Publication, 1970); Wynetta Willis Martin, *Black Mormon Tells Her Story* (Salt Lake City: Hawkes Publications, 1972); Joseph Freeman, *In the Lord’s Due Time* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979); and Darron Terry Smith, *What Matters Most: A Story of Human Potential* (Salt Lake City: Scribe Publishing, 1999). Apologetic works by Black Latter-day Saints also omit lineage and dis-

other is the Church handbook, which neither addresses nor repudiates the Cain and Ham lineage designations. The handbook stipulates that patriarchs do not have “to declare lineage from a particular tribe,” but instructs patriarchs to assign “blessings through [Israel].”¹²⁶ Recognizing the problem, Darius Gray has forcefully explained that this is a deficiency that needs to be addressed. As Gray ruefully noted to an apologetic Mormon group in 2012, “We have Patriarchs who still aren’t aware that lineage can and should be declared, regardless of race or ethnicity.” He bore testimony affirming that “we can do that, get there, [and] get to be what [God] would have us be.” But Gray was cautiously optimistic. He believed that Latter-day Saints “have a long way to go.”¹²⁷

From Gray’s experience and those of the participants in this story it is clear that lineage for Black Latter-day Saints has been applied unevenly and inconsistently throughout Mormon history. But the problem goes deeper than just omitting lineage. In teaching that Blacks derived from Cain and Ham, Church leaders boxed themselves into a theological corner. They discouraged patriarchs from declaring the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on Black Latter-day Saints because those were priesthood and temple blessings; but neither did they encourage patriarchs to declare lineage through Cain or Ham, notwithstanding Joseph Fielding Smith’s statement that a “Negro may have a patriarchal blessing, but it would declare him to be of the lineage of Cain or

cussions of patriarchal blessings. See Luckner Huggins, *A Son of Ham: Under the Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Noah’s Family Publishing, 2005); and Marcus H. Martins, *Setting the Record Straight: Blacks and the Mormon Priesthood* (Orem, Utah: Millennial Press, 2007). Two exceptions discussing patriarchal blessings in their books include Black LDS authors Mary Sturlaugson Eyer, *A Soul So Rebellious* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 66–67; and Wain Myers with Kelly L. Martinez, *From Baptist Preacher to Mormon Teacher* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2015), 64. Neither discuss lineage, however.

126. “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs,” 4.

127. Gray and Young, “No Johnny-Come-Lately.”

Canaan.”¹²⁸ The priesthood revelation of 1978 eased some of the tension when the apostles affirmed that Blacks could now be “adopted into the House of Israel” as full participants in Mormon liturgical rites. But this doctrinal shift did not resolve the vexing question of whether or not Black people derived from the “seed of Cain.” The current Church handbook states that “some church members may not have any of the lineage of Israel.”¹²⁹ This is a startling admission given a recent Church statement that “disavows” that Black people are cursed.¹³⁰ In the years to come, the Church will undoubtedly align the antiquated Church handbook with the new “Race and the Priesthood” essay. This will be an important task, especially as the Church continues to baptize and proclaim patriarchal blessings on people of color.

128. Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5:168.

129. “Information and Suggestions for Patriarchs,” 4. See also Dallin H. Oaks, “Patriarchal Blessings,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting* (Jan. 8, 2005): 8 (my thanks to Mike Marquardt for this reference).

130. “Race and the Priesthood,” *Gospel Topics*, Dec. 2013, <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.